John the Scythian

(fl. c. 482 – c. 498)

BRIEFING

John the Scythian (Latin: *Iohannes Scytha*, Greek: Ἰωάννης ὁ Σκύθης; *floruit* 482–498) was a general and a politician of the Eastern Roman Empire who fought against the usurper Leontius (484–488) and in the Isaurian War (492–497).

BIOGRAPHY

Life

John was an officer of the East Roman army. In 482, he was sent to Illyricum together with Moschianus to fight the Ostrogoths of Theodoric the Amal.

In 483, the Emperor Zeno decided to get rid of his *magister militum per Orientem* ("Commander in Chief of the East") Illus, replacing him with John.

In 484, Illus rebelled and put forward the civil officer Leontius as emperor. John and Theodoric, with a large army, defeated Illus and Leontius near Antioch in September of that year. The two rebels fled to Isauria and holed up in the fortress of Papurius. John laid siege to the fortress; towards the end of 484, he captured and killed Trocundus, Illus' brother, who had gone out to seek reinforcements. The siege lasted until 488, when the fortress fell to treachery and both Illus and Leontius were put to death.

During the reign of Emperor Anastasius I, John fought in the Isaurian War (492–497), obtaining a joint command of the army with John the Hunchback. He was one of Roman commanders in the battle of Cotyaeum of 492, while in 497 defeated the Isaurians, capturing and killing their leaders Longinus of Cardala and Athenodorus, and sending their heads to Constantinople.

The Battle of Cotyaeum

The **Battle of Cotyaeum** (modern Kütahya) of 492 CE was a major engagement is the Isaurian War fought in Phrygia Epictetus. The future Byzantine emperor Justin I was present at the battle as a subordinate commander.

In 2015 a mass grave containing around sixty skeletons was found in Kütahya, believed to be of Roman date. Investigations are ongoing as to whether these skeletons are victims of the Isaurian War or the Battle of Cotyaeum.

Fate

Anastasius was very pleased with the victory and honored his generals. John the Scythian was appointed consul for 498, while John the Hunchback was given the consulship for 499.